

# **From target language to translingual capabilities. Harnessing plurilingual repertoires for language learning and teaching**

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## **Abstract**

Language teaching in the 21st century has undergone a rapid transformation, marked not only by the impact of digital technology, but also by shifting ideas about language learning and the nature of language. Drawing on a case study of a New Zealand/German bilingual online exchange (telecollaboration), this paper introduces two teachers' attempts to create new and authentic learning opportunities aimed to accommodate the curricular demands for the two 'target' languages German and English, along with a broader objective to foster plurilingual proficiencies. The idea of language learning as achieving "a monolingual-like command of an additional language" (Ortega, 2009, p. 5) may not serve the needs of contemporary learners, who are increasingly faced with fluid language practices, particularly in online encounters. This view is evident in the increasing recognition of language acquisition as a process of becoming bi/multilingual and, importantly, of learners' plurilingual repertoires as a resource, rather than deficit (Narcy-Combes et al., 2019). The case presented here exemplifies how plurilingual practices can be facilitated and help leverage learner community building.

**Key term:** plurilingual repertoires; reflective teaching; translingual practice

## **Abstract**

Sprachunterricht im 21sten Jahrhundert hat rapide Veränderungen durchgemacht, was sich nicht nur im Einfluss digitaler Technologien äußert, sondern auch durch ein sich änderndes Verständnis von Spracherwerb und Sprache. Dieser Beitrag präsentiert eine Fallstudie eines neuseeländisch-deutschen bilingualen Austauschs online (Telekollaboration) und schildert die Bemühungen zweier Lehrkräfte, neuartige und authentische Lernanlässe zu schaffen, um die Erreichung der Lernziele für die Zielsprachen Deutsch und English zu unterstützen sowie plurilinguale Kompetenzen zu fördern. Heutzutage treffen Sprachlernende zunehmend auf fluiden Sprachgebrauch, besonders in Begegnungen online, wobei die Vorstellung vom Spracherwerb als „monolinguale Beherrschung einer zusätzlichen Sprache“ (Ortega, 2009, p. 5) den heutigen Bedürfnissen von Sprachlernern nicht dienen mag. Spracherwerb wird zunehmend als Prozess der Zwei- bzw. Mehrsprachigkeitsentwicklung betrachtet, und damit einhergehend die Anerkennung von bilingualen Repertoires als sprachliche Resource statt Defizit verstanden (Narcy-Combes et al., 2019). Die dargestellte Fallstudie veranschaulicht wie plurilinguale Praktiken ermöglicht werden und die Entstehung einer Lerngemeinschaft fördern.

**Schlüsselbegriff:** Plurilinguale Repertoires; reflexives Lehren; translinguale Praxis

## **1. Introduction**

"50 years after the computer was invented, we do not have old language learning plus the computer, but we have a different language learning" (Warschauer, 1998, p. 760). This appraisal was made at the cusp of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when language learning and teaching were to face further ongoing and rapid change in the face of technological advances and globalising processes. Two decades later, and under

the influence of multiple 'shifts' in the second language acquisition field, Warschauer's idea of a 'different language learning' is fitting in more (interconnected) ways than one. As the world has become more globalised and connected, languages are learnt and taught in ever more diverse contexts, both face-to-face and increasingly facilitated through web-based technologies. Hybrid uses of language have become a salient feature of urban, online and educational contexts in new contact zones created through migration, mobility and technologization. Against this background, new explanatory models have been advanced to describe fluid language practices and dynamic forms of expression in a superdiverse world, challenging the idea of 'second' language learning as a process of developing "a monolingual-like command of an additional language" (Ortega, 2009, p. 5). This article addresses the question as to how language educators can be responsive to this changing sociolinguistic and educational landscape and how they might negotiate its new challenges and opportunities.

## 2. Background

Change is not new, and educators have always had to be adaptable. However, in the face of rapid technological, globalizing processes and unprecedented diversity "notions such as complexity, nonlinearity and unpredictability have become objects of increased interest of professionals in practically all spheres of life including education and teacher education" (Cvetek, 2008, p. 247). The concern in languages education with teaching a single 'target' language may no longer hold true in our globalized and increasingly mobile and connected world where multilingualism has become the new linguistic dispensation (Singleton, Fishman, Aronin & Ó Laoire, 2013). Contemporary multilingualism differs from that of the past not only in scope due to unprecedented levels of diversity, but also in the way it is "enmeshed in globalization, technologization, and mobility" (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 19). Not only is the diversity of learners a feature of many language classrooms today but, more and more, both learners and teachers operate in evolving and complex communicative environments, mediated by an array of digital technologies that cross space and time, which calls into question the very notion of classroom as a bounded physical space. The dramatic shift to online and remote teaching due to the global Covid19 pandemic has made this abundantly clear and foregrounds the imperative not only for 'open-wall' learning spaces but also border-crossing alternatives at times when international borders are closed.

The notion of language has equally come under scrutiny where it refers to the traditional understanding of language as a static, monolithic system. Rooted in the Chomskyan tradition of language as a formal system of structures, linguistic competence has been oriented to that of "an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly" (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3). Although this conceptualisation was framed within general linguistics and carefully distinguishes competence from performance, its prevailing influence is evident in the ongoing reliance "on the monolingual native speaker's idealized competence as a benchmark for defining and evaluating L2 learning" (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 35). Ideal native-speaker standards present an unattainable target for many language learners and are often at odds with the lived realities of individuals' and communities' plurilingual repertoires at varying levels of proficiency. What "the multilingual condition has meant in terms of teachers' knowledge is the need to move beyond the traditional (and largely monolingually conceived) notions of language, language learning, and language learners" (Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016, p. 122).

Recent epistemological shifts offer new perspectives on how we may understand language, language use and language learning and teaching. Calls for theoretical re-framing of second language

acquisition (SLA)<sup>1</sup> have argued for an integrated (Doughty & Long, 2008) and transdisciplinary approach to account for the changing nature of language teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, most recently by the multi-author Douglas Fir Group (2016). Their contention is that in a multilingual world “a new, rethought SLA begins with the social worlds of L2 learners” (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 39) who utilise their linguistic repertoires to interact within their communities. The notion of repertoire has been advanced to account for the range of linguistic and broader semiotic resources individuals can draw on as part of their indexical biographies (Blommaert & Backus, 2011). Thus, as Conteh & Meier (2014) argue “all learners in classrooms have repertoires of languages and/or linguistic varieties, which could be activated as vehicles for learning and to foster language awareness and curiosity about their own languages and those of others” (p. 3).

A significant reconceptualization of the idea of language came with the shift in thinking from language as system to language production, captured in Swain’s (2006) notion of languaging or “the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (p. 98) in contexts of use. Building on this notion, bi/multilingual languaging has been described as translingual practice (Canagarajah, 2013), flexible bilingualism (Creese & Blackledge, 2011), codemeshing (Canagarajah, 2011), polylingual languaging (Jørgensen, 2008) or translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Wei, 2014). These perspectives aim to disrupt the idea of language learning as monolingual practice and have a lot to offer in explaining plurilingual and increasingly hybrid language practices. Yet, translating such new ways of thinking into new ways of doing is a key challenge for the language teaching profession, particularly when it comes to long-held monolingual views of language teaching and learning:

Such is the hegemony of monolingualism in these fields; try as we might, we have not wholly escaped from the established terminology associated with it – most notably, the still ubiquitous terms of ‘native speaker’ and, of course, ‘language’ itself. (May, 2014, p. 2)

The multilingual turn (Conteh & Meier, 2014; May, 2013) has effectively critiqued the dominance of monolingual perspectives in SLA, TESOL, and bilingual education theories, pedagogies and practices and might even have achieved “theoretical reality” (Conteh & Meier, 2014, p. 297). Yet, in language education the key challenge for teachers remains to enact and legitimise multilingual approaches in their teaching practice.

In linguistically diverse classroom settings teachers may draw on learners’ languages as a resource as bi/multilingual repertoires may offer greater affordances for meaning-making. While individual teachers may be sympathetic to this idea or have adopted multilingual teaching approaches, institutional policies often marginalise or even curtail such attempts, driven by the ideology of monolingualism as default position “for the human capacity for language” (Ortega, 2013, p. 34). The ability to exploit changing conditions in pedagogically informed ways also requires a re-evaluation of the role of the teacher and in this regard language teacher education has a major role to play. As Scarino (2014) points out:

The change in the role of teachers, in turn, necessitates a change in teacher education to meet the challenges of the dynamic nature of learning in the context of diversity. This is distinctively so for teachers of languages, whose learning area is both an area of learning in its own right and a medium for learning. (p. 387)

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<sup>1</sup> A term which in itself is limiting, as is ‘L2’ or ‘second language learning’. In this article I use these terms to refer more broadly to any additional language learning.

Perceptions of and aspirations for the learner are undergoing change and have implications for what teachers do. For example, in advocating for an intercultural approach to language teacher education Kelly (2017) believes that teachers would feel encouraged “to set learners the aim of being a competent language user and a plurilingual citizen in a multilingual world<sup>2</sup>, consistent with the Council of Europe's aim of educating ‘responsible citizens in a pluralist democratic society’” (p. 3). Setting such lofty goals has implications for teacher education and raises the question as to what constitutes language teachers’ knowledge base. For example, in the New Zealand context the Strategy for Languages in Education in Aotearoa New Zealand 2019 - 2033 states that:

A broader view of languages is required for New Zealand to fully benefit from investing in language learning and acquisition. Methods proven through research and practice to be successful and sustainable such as CLIL (content and language integrated learning) and TBLT (task-based language teaching) should form the basis of language teaching and learning for all learners. (Auckland Languages Strategy Working Group, 2018, p. 17)

If such a ‘broader’ view of language learning is limited to a narrow methods focus, language and language awareness will continue to be taken for granted as part of teachers’ knowledge base, rather than constitute a central concern for language educators who need to understand how language works in an evolving multilingual world. With reference to TESOL teacher education Yates and Muchisky (2003) caution against an approach that privileges knowing how to teach over knowing language and urge that:

language teacher educators must provide teacher learners with a basis for reflection about language teaching that is grounded in what is known about how languages are organized, how languages are learned, and what options are available for language teaching influenced by the settings in which that teaching takes place. (p. 145)

In view of shifts in thinking about language and language learning, what does this mean for teachers and how do these shifts impact on their practice? Examples of how teachers adopt transformative pedagogies in different parts of the world to foster plurilingual practices and outcomes have been presented in edited volumes by authors such as Conteh & Meier (2014), Creese & Martin (2003) and Hélot & Ó Laoire (2011), to name a few. They show how teacher and learner agency can build on plurilingual resources in a wide range of classroom ecologies. The following section provides a case example of how teacher agency created affordances for language learning via multilingual/multimodal encounters and by emulating the kind of communicative practices prevalent in multilingual, digitally-mediated life-worlds which involve “different interlocutors, for diverse purposes, across space and time” (The Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 23).

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<sup>2</sup> Both plurilingualism and multilingualism are abstractions which suggest the presence of discrete languages at the individual or societal level respectively. Although multilingualism has wide currency outside of Europe, plurilingualism is used in this article to emphasise speaker-specific linguistic practices. As neither term necessarily captures hybrid translingual linguistic practices, these are discussed from a translanguaging perspective.

### 3. Case study: a New Zealand-German telecollaboration

This section describes a telecollaborative project (or virtual exchange) which was jointly devised by two teachers situated in New Zealand and Germany respectively. It is presented here to illustrate the opportunities and challenges of reflective teaching, aimed to improve responsiveness to learner needs through leveraging the affordances of technological and plurilingual resources.

Telecollaboration refers to a virtual exchange intended to foster language learning and intercultural competence (Belz, 2003; Ware & Kramsch, 2005), sociopragmatic competence (Abrams, 2008) and participation in a community of learners (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Walker, 2017b) through real-life communication and "social co-creativity" (Lamy & Goodfellow, 2010, p.109). Successful online learning partnerships crucially rely on the ability to co-construct collaborative dialogue and negotiate meaning through languaging (Swain, 2006). Even if language learners have opportunities to access speakers of their target language, interaction is not guaranteed, let alone collaborative partnerships, which depend on learners recognizing each other as trustworthy communication partners. In this regard, task design plays a key role and presents a challenge to teachers in that methods and activities which work in face-to-face classrooms may not translate successfully into online, technology-facilitated spaces. The following gives an account of how the two teachers took a collaborative approach to creating an online exchange project and how they resolved integrating it into two different curricular environments to accommodate two different target languages and two distinct learner cohorts. The latter involved intermediate/advanced level distance learners of German as a foreign language at a New Zealand university and advanced learners of Academic English for the Social Sciences studying face-to-face at a German university<sup>3</sup>.

#### 3.1 From reflection to action

Being relatively new to distance language teaching, the New Zealand-based teacher (author) had become keenly aware of a number of constraints affecting the learning experiences and outcomes for her students. This awareness emerged through her observations, formal and informal student feedback, as well as conversations with other languages teachers in the programme who faced similar challenges. These talks resulted in an action research project aimed to find ways to better understand distance language learners' beliefs, needs and strategies with a view to developing teaching approaches and resources (Walker & Haddon, 2011). At the same time, the introduction of Wimba communication tools in the languages department provided the impetus to address three long-standing concerns, in particular the limited opportunities for:

- authentic interaction in the target language
- intercultural learning (primarily through engagement with the textbook resources and a culture as content approach)
- reducing isolation and creating a sense of community among distance language learners

A suite of synchronous and asynchronous communication tools was available within the language courses' WebCT virtual learning environments and had proved very useful for online tutorials in particular but tended to be limited to structured exercises or activities. At the intermediate and advanced levels of German, for example, online discussion was sporadic and tended to be teacher-initiated. While the intermediate level course text *Anders gedacht* (Motyl-Mudretzkyj & Späinghaus, 2005) offered activities for interpersonal and critical thinking through 'creative self-expression' about

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<sup>3</sup> These proficiency levels correspond with CEFR Levels B2/C1.

current issues in German-speaking societies, these were designed for classroom-based settings and did not translate easily into an online learning ecology. When an online portfolio task was trialled to encourage fortnightly peer-to-peer discussion about the course topics, most students completed the tasks just before the end of the semester and sometimes with little apparent interest in either the topics or partner discussion, as this synchronous chat in the final study week shows:

- S1 whew okay lets get this sorted b4 u dash off...so ...5 tasks  
 S2 yeah we can do ideal urlaub that's cool. so we have to do 5 of them?  
 S1 yep >>wat else looks quik n easy...lol  
 S2 ok well you can choose if you want cos i really don't care!  
 S1 neither do i....

To promote more active online interactions, the teacher sought opportunities for her learners to engage with other speakers of German on authentic but less structured topics. Through collegial networks, contact was made with a teacher of English at a German university, who showed a keen interest in an online intercultural exchange with her students. This marked the beginning of a rich interchange between the two teachers and resulted in a series of telecollaborative exchanges.

### 3.2 Developing, planning and implementing the project

Both teachers subscribed to a constructivist model of learning and agreed on a CMC instructional approach aimed to facilitate knowledge construction through engagement in social interaction. They were initially guided by the E-tandem-learning principles of reciprocity and autonomy (Brammerts, 1996), but opted for a groups-based telecollaboration model where “tasks generally involve different linguistic and cultural communities and thereby have a strong possibility of producing negotiation of meaning” (O’Dowd & Waire, 2009, pp. 174-5). The design and planning stages involved consideration of how the project would achieve its purpose, while also serving the students’ respective curricular demands, particularly with regards to assessment. A task-based design was adopted which would fit into the existing course structures as an optional activity that would help students achieve pre-existing assessment components in their target languages: a report/presentation (Germany) and a written reflection or essay (New Zealand). The German students were expected to collect empirical data with the help of their New Zealand partners and present a report on their findings in their face-to-face class, while the New Zealand students reflected on their collaboration experience in writing. These distinct assessment formats added a layer of complexity to the exchange and required the students to self-regulate as a group in order to achieve their respective learning outcomes together. This included ways of accommodating both of their languages during their engagements<sup>4</sup>. Although the teachers had set a general expectation to use both German and English for mutual learner benefit, it was left to each group to organise their communicative strategies.

Following an initial pilot in 2007, two further telecollaboations called eGroups were conducted in 2008. While in the pilot students made links to specific textbook topics, this structured approach was replaced in favour of a more open theme-based task design in the eGroups. The overarching theme of "Globalisation and localisation: opportunities and challenges" called on the students to identify related issues of interest to be examined in small groups. The theme was set to ensure coherence with the New Zealand students' study of contemporary issues in the German-speaking world while broadly connecting to the German students’ social sciences disciplines. The learners were asked to explore their chosen issue from environmental, social, cultural or economic perspectives, which generated

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<sup>4</sup> Modelled via strategies such as code-switching or translation in their interactions with the students.

broad discussion topics such as green politics, migration or cultural and linguistic diversity. Students with a shared interest then formed small groups for joint exploration of a group topic. Examples of students' choices included: the sale of culture to global interests, education of migrant children, migrant integration, tattooing as cultural practice, energy consumption and green technologies<sup>5</sup>. This, in turn, provided a basis for creating distinct artefacts which aligned with their respective assessment structures.

The project's two-way bilingual format encouraged the students to engage as emergent bilinguals (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2004) whose respective languages were afforded equal relevance and importance. The task-based approach aimed to address the learners' communicative needs through real-world, meaning-focused activities (Levy & Stockwell, 2006) by carrying out joint tasks online (Guth, Helm & O'Dowd, 2014). This aim was facilitated by giving the learners access to each other's institutional learning platforms where they were able to connect via a range of communication tools: an asynchronous forum for initial contact and ongoing follow-up between synchronous meetings; Wimba synchronous and asynchronous audio-graphic tools used for meeting online to negotiate and plan tasks; a wiki for joint writing (e.g. drafting ideas for the German students' reports). Although the synchronous audiographic tool had limited functionality compared to contemporary technologies, the students were excited to hear each other's voices "from the other side of the world" in real time and became adept at using the one-speaker-at-a-time mode, effectively combining voice mode with the written chat.

### 3.3 Outcomes

The teachers noted a balance between structure and flexibility provided by overall parameters (theme, purpose, objectives, tools etc.) on the one hand, and the distinct ways in which the learners enacted and shaped these, on the other. Instead of choosing a ready-made topic, the learners needed to identify and negotiate a topic which would relate to the overall theme and had a specific enough focus to work with. For example, in choosing an environmental perspective, one of the groups narrowed down their topic from green policy to pollution, to household energy pollution and finally to household energy consumption, taking a comparative angle.

#### 3.3.1 Benefits for learners

The teachers remained in constant contact with each other during and after the collaboration and identified a number of benefits through joint reflection and post-project evaluation. While the learners were not formally surveyed, anonymous course feedback as well as some of the German students' final reflections confirmed much of what the teachers had observed, notably new opportunities for intercultural experiences and authentic communication. Other benefits included:

- a space for authentic interaction in a less regimented format, allowing for bilingual languaging

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<sup>5</sup> Some of these were inspired by 'taster' readings such as: Borley, C. (2008). Chinese nurses could help shortage. New Zealand Herald. Retrieved April 9, 2008 from: [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=10502883](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10502883); Pure New Zealand America's Cup, Valencia. Tourism NZ, April 13, 2007; Maori Russian dolls made in China, sold in NZ. The Dominion Post. Retrieved: November 27, 2020 from: <http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/archive/national-news/361204/Maori-Russian-dolls-made-in-China-sold-in-NZ#:~:text=Chinese%2Dmade%20%22Russian%22%20nesting,new%20trade%20deal%20with%20China.>

- access to speakers of respective target languages
- ability to participate in and contribute to someone else's world, while enriching their own perspectives - a key factor for intercultural learning
- gaining a sense of confidence by acting as mutual experts
- finding common ground in a complex situation and a chance to develop real life, transferrable competencies in a non-threatening setting

### 3.3.2 Benefits for teachers

The project also required collaboration between the two teachers for whom the project was both the result and a source of ongoing reflection, as well as a springboard for action research. Specific teacher benefits noted by the teachers included:

- exploration and application of complementary theoretical approaches (constructivism, sociocultural theory, intercultural learning)
- capacity building around a pedagogically informed use of technology, handling and interpretation of learner discourse and shaping their own collaborative processes towards joint construction of practice
- an opportunity for reflective teaching

More formal insights into the telecollaboration were made through empirical studies which investigated the learners' discourses post-completion (vom Brocke, 2011; Walker & vom Brocke, 2009, 2012; Walker, 2017a, b; 2018). The data for these studies were collected from system-recorded audio-chat transcripts. The following section brings together some of the key findings of those studies.

### 3.3.3 Features of learner discourses

Learner participation varied due to the optional nature of the collaboration. However, a number of very active groups generated a significant amount of languaging in both written and spoken mode, particularly during the 4 to 5 live meetings, each of which lasted anywhere between 40 to 90 minutes. The extent of spoken language varied within and across groups and was supported by chatting, for instance in chat-only mode for an entire meeting (e.g. where one participant didn't have a microphone) or, more often than not, in the form of backchanneling to ask questions or seek clarifications. This dual mode of communication also enabled translingual choices. The overview presented in Table 1 shows a total of 529 turns produced by the 3 participating students in this particular 'environmental' group. A notable feature of their learner discourse is the alternation between the languages at their disposal, each dedicated to entire sections within or across meetings.



Meeting	Turns	Discussion topics	Linguistic resources	Mode
1 1 May	231	Exploring response to project theme, modus operandi, preliminary topic decision.	English in the first half, followed by a conscious switch to German initiated by one student.	Start of meeting written (first 60 turns) then spoken, with occasional chat.
2 6 May	58	Narrowing down topic, process, negotiating division of labour, emerging team sense.	Initially German among GMN students then switch to English when NZ student joins with greetings in English.	Written only (lack of microphone).
3 9 May	138	Workload uncertainties, information overload, process for data collection, languages for outputs.	Almost entirely in German, as agreed in previous meeting.	First 26 turns/ 28 last turns written; the remainder predominantly spoken.
4 26 May	67	Addressing perceived unequal workload/ expressing/ responding to resistance, negotiating questionnaire distribution, resolving potential conflict.	Except for two turns, entirely in German.	5 written turns at start, then all spoken, some long turns.
5 29 May	35	Modifying questionnaire work to relieve GMN student, request for final check of wiki, benefits and insights gained.	NZ and GMN student in German only while waiting for third member.	Written only.

**Table 1:** Overview of synchronous meetings - environmental group<sup>6</sup>

The collaboration enabled the learners to produce substantially more authentic ‘target’ language than they normally would, and about real-life topics. Beyond quantity, it was the distinct quality of their discourses which differed most from the typically monolingual mode in the traditionally structured part of the courses. As their engagement proceeded, distinct patterns of language choice emerged once the learners began to grapple with ideas. Some interactants made explicit suggestions to switch to one language or the other at specific points as shown in this instance between KAT the New Zealand student and her German partner ANI:

Excerpt 1

KAT [v<sup>7</sup>] we could always eh speak like English for half an hour and German for the other half, we can practise both languages at the same time. ....

ANI [v] Oh that’s a good idea Kat. So maybe we try it that way ehm so up to half past ten we will speak English and then switch to German.

Others, in contrast, employed translingual practices such as intra- and intersentential code-switching, where in the cultural group the two German students JUL and STR and HEA the New Zealand student are experiencing interference issues with the sound (Table 2). Of note here is the multi-modal character of their dialogue which employs a number of typed sad faces and winking smiles to express emotions, as well as the use of French by JUL and tongue-in-cheek reference to Hindi by STR. This

<sup>6</sup> With 2 GMN students 1 NZL student

<sup>7</sup> Verbal to denote speaking.

written (w) and spoken (v) exchange gives the impression that the learners are naturally and playfully constructing a plurilingual conversation:

Student	Transcript	English gloss
HEA [v]	Es räuscht immer noch stark.	There's still a lot of noise
JUL [v]	empfange es sehr als rauschend	Am receiving a lot of noise
HEA [w]	:-( !	
STR [w]	mmmhhh, dann weiß ich auch nicht :-(	well then I don't know either
JUL [w]	At 9 I have a date with my bank, so we might collect our items to talk about now?	
STR [w]	:-((( ;-)) Deutsch oder englisch heute?	German or English today?
JUL[w]	Je m'en fiche ; ) ist mir egal HEA? [I don't mind, HEA?]	I don't care. I don't mind.
HEA [w]	Macht mir nichts aus	it's all the same to me
JUL[w]	; )	
HEA [w]	- kein Fransoesisch, BITTE! NEIN STR	No French, PLEASE! NO STR
STR [w]	Hindi?!	

**Table 2:** Getting organised translingually

The same group of students drew on their plurilingual repertoires when addressing issues or potential conflicts. In the following example (Table 3) they attempt to sort out how to record progress in meetings for the benefit of those unable to attend, prompted by JUL's request for a summary of the previous meeting. The incorrect calque 'protocol' (German *Protokoll* meaning minutes) prompts negotiation of meaning but also a comment by STR who seemed concerned about work associated with minute taking. HEA suggests the meeting archives as an alternative and JUL reassures STR, reflecting an awareness of her partner's potential anxiety. The German students also draw on their New Zealand partner's help in determining an appropriate English term to refer to notes. While superficially about language, the conversation extract reveals the learners' sensitivity to each other and their willingness for mutual support.

Student	Transcript	English gloss
JUL [w]	Vielleicht können wir zusammenfassen, was gestern noch geschah? Ich wäre gerne auf dem neuesten Stand. Wie geht es weiter mit dem Projekt, was machen wir heute - ohne ? SIB	Perhaps we could summarise what happened yesterday? I'd like to be up-to-date. How to continue with the project, what are we doing today – without SIB
STR [v]	Where is SIB?	
JUL [v]	Ich weiss nicht, wo SIB ist. Hat sie gestern nichts gesagt? Oder geschrieben?	I don't know where SIB is. Didn't she say anything yesterday? Or write?
STR [w]	did she mention that she won't be there today?	
JUL [w]	we need the protocol	

STR [w]	ich habe schon eine kurze zusammenfassung für dich ins forum gestellt, jul!	I have already posted a short summary for you in the forum jul!
JUL [v]	Wie? Wo ist das Forum? Ich kanns nicht finden.	Sorry? Where is the forum? I can't find it
HEA [w]	I'm not sure whether it was for today or not, but she did mention something.	
STR [w]	mmmhh	
JUL [w]	super STR, it's not protocoll - i guess it's 'log' oder 'minutes'. what would be appropriate, HEA?	
HEA [w]	Minutes? You are talking about the notes of what happened last meeting?	
JUL [w]	ah, notes. Ja genau, das was gestern noch so passierte im Chat	Yes exactly, what happened in the chat yesterday
STR [w]	I didn't know we have to do that every time we meet....???	
HEA [w]	If you go to the archives you can see what we said	
JUL [v]	Du, wir müssen keine Protokolle machen. Ich war nur neugierig. Ich wollte Dich nicht unter Stress setzen STR	Hey, we don't have to write minutes. I was only curious. I didn't want to stress you out STR
JUL [w]	:) so today....? We could mindmap what questions might be good for the future opiniaire / questionnaire	
STR [w]	but we can also do a short summary for JUL know, can't we? ääh now, of course	
HEA [v]	Okay	

**Table 3:** Translingual problem solving

In another focal group translingual practice facilitated language play. In their discussion about migration-related issues the members' interactions alternated between work and play, where the latter often created a sense of lightheartedness and fun. The following chat extract shows the students' ability to engage in teasing (you losers) and self-deprecating humour (*Streber*, quarknutella<sup>8</sup> eating losers) and suggests an emerging level of trust as a basis for taking risks with each other.

Excerpt 2:

STE [w] We are on holidays.  
 LIS[w] haben alle Ferien? [is everyone on holiday?]  
 VAN [w] But we are Streber [nerds]. We are attending class. ;)  
 LIS [w] you losers!  
 VAN [w] Yes we are losers.  
 STE [w] boring quarknutella eating losers have FUN too!  
 VAN [w] sorry. that you have to talk to us. You could change the room  
 LIS [w] :-)

<sup>8</sup> Reference to a popular German-style fresh cheese topped with Nutella.

VAN [w] ;)  
 STE [w] :—-)  
 LIS [w] I was only joking ...  
 STE [w] GS2, let's leave and have weird breakfast somewhere else, einverstanden [agreed]?

### 3.4 Functions of plurilingual practices

In-depth analyses of the three different focal groups' interactions (Walker 2017a, b; Walker 2018) revealed that the learners' plurilingual repertoires supported a number of distinct functions, namely:

- Phatic: to facilitate social bonds which fostered discursively constructed social presence as a crucial factor for building trust among unknown and distributed co-learners (Walker, 2017a).
- Communicative: to construct collaborative floor (Cherny, 1999) and create shared conversational spaces which facilitated exploratory talk about their topics.
- Creative: to co-create knowledge by drawing on their intellectual, social and linguistic skills and emerging collaborative agency.
- Identity and community construction: to project themselves as agile individuals who are able to shuttle between and across their linguistic repertoires, which helped them to develop a sense of shared purpose and group belonging.

The learners' collaborative activity enabled them to co-create knowledge, drawing on their intellectual, relational, social and linguistic skills and motivated by a sense of common purpose. Without the necessary trust and group cohesion the learners would not have been able to build a "shared space and a sense community-centred identity and belonging" (Darhower, 2006, p. 86). Their social relationships were discursively mediated through rich cohesive ties, evident in phatic/vocative communication, displays of emotion, mutual support and co-constructed collaborative floor. This helped them build and sustain interactive engagement, develop a social structure and take up social-facilitative roles. They negotiated a shared understanding of ideas through exploratory talk engaging constructively with other's ideas, collective reasoning and problem-solving. Their ability to self-regulate as groups and draw on others as resources reflected collaborative agency which allowed them to think things through together, expand on challenging concepts in new ways and create knowledge and artefacts (e.g. wiki).

The learners' translingual practices afforded them an expanded linguistic repertoire which fostered collaborative agency. This was particularly evident in the amount of exploratory talk produced translingually in which the students engaged with each other's ideas and negotiated meaning with a view to constructing knowledge and artefacts together. Humour and playfulness served as a distinct discursive strategy in one group to manage or avoid conflict, supported by fluid and creative uses of plurilingual practices, particularly when engaging in teasing behaviour and projecting their play identities.

### 3.5 Challenges and opportunities for teaching

The most challenging aspect of the project was to sustain participation and create conditions that would encourage these diverse students to interact and engage – despite the project's perceived complexity. The envisaged benefit of flexibility and learner-centredness also presented the risk of overtaxing the learners who had to handle technology and tools in new ways, operate in an unfamiliar group environment and actively engage with unknown partners. The optional nature of the project nevertheless allowed for different levels of investment and participation. Technological constraints

(e.g. non-availability of video, two different LMS) or different course & semester structures also impacted on the teachers' ability to integrate the project into their respective language courses. Importantly, the project challenged the teachers to question their roles as the project required a shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach. Although both teachers felt comfortable in their roles as facilitators, they needed to develop strategies for coping with less control and, instead, concentrate on scaffolding, monitoring and supporting the learners. They came to understand the construct of learner community not as a fixed, essentialised quality but an emergent process which comes into existence "through social and work activity sustained over time" (Rheingold, 1993, cited in Galley et al., 2014, p. 8) and jointly enacted through discourse. Finally, the project reinforced their understanding of language learning as developing plurilingual repertoires, supported by translingual practices.

#### 4. Discussion

The case presented in this article demonstrates how a new initiative came into being through collaborative teacher agency. The telecollaboration helped create online encounters which provided new opportunities for intercultural experiences and collaborative learning. Not only did the students engage with each other on authentic issues of global and local importance, but they also developed plurilingual communication practices in distinct contrast to their traditional experience of learning languages in isolation. Learners who have been conditioned to formal language education delivered in monolingual mode may resist plurilingual pedagogies. Yet, as Kramsch and Huffmaster (2015) argue, "the exclusive use of monolingual/national points of reference deprives learners of the transnational, translingual and transcultural competencies they will need to use the language in today's multilingual environments" (p. 114). Telecollaboration offers one possible model of helping learners develop those kinds of competencies. For this or other models to be effective a different kind of teaching is needed, one where the use of digital or mobile technologies is purposefully linked to pedagogical decisions. Adopting a reflective teaching stance allowed the teachers to be open to new and exploratory practice (Allwright & Hanks, 2009) which generated:

- a data-led approach to reflection as favoured by Mann and Walsh (2013), for instance by capturing learner discourses as well as their own use of language in teaching situations;
- a focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher knowledge by moving "beyond the traditional (and largely monolingually conceived" notions of language, language learning, and language learner (Kubanyiova & Crookes, 2016, p. 118).

Transforming teaching and learning languages in a multilingual world requires reorienting our role as language educators and researchers to a "new linguistic dispensation" (Aronin & Singleton, 2008), towards a better understanding and legitimisation of situated practices such as translanguaging. The reflective teacher plays a key role in that regard. Language practitioners can make an important contribution to teacher education programmes by reshaping traditional discourses in the light of the affordances of new practices. Openness to such practices requires critical reflection of the constructs which frame our reflections. Through their joint work and observations the teachers re-evaluated what it means to learn, know and teach a language. They both saw their role as that of a facilitator who creates the conditions for a learning environment which promotes student interaction, critical reflection and inquiry by drawing on their plurilingual repertoires. Likewise, monolithic perceptions of language were reconceptualised as a form of bilingual languaging and recognised (post-hoc) as translanguaging practice. Reorienting language teaching from monolingual to multilingual perspectives will critically depend on resolving what is meant by language and by extension 'target

language' in teaching and learning discourses. This requires sensitivity and an acknowledgment that named languages are real in the consciousness of learners and teachers as the object of their aspirations. As Canagarajah (2013) observes:

While language resources are mobile, they acquire labels and identities through situated uses in particular contexts and get reified through language ideologies. Therefore, labelled languages and language varieties have a reality for social groups. More importantly, they are an important form of identity for these groups. (pp. 15-16)

While there is debate about whether plurilingual repertoires have a unified or separate mental representation (MacSwan, 2017), translanguaging as pedagogy attends to the role of fluid languaging in education, though not without controversy. This is also evident in attempts to "soften the boundaries between languages" (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013, p. 591) or the argument to shift the focus from language as system to language as discourse (Clancy & McCarthy, 2019) to emphasise meaning-making and ways in which discourse communities vary in how they exploit their plurilingual repertoires. If language educators are serious about rejecting monolingual assumptions and practices and giving greater consideration to language learners' plurilingual repertoires and identities, there are important implications for teaching. These require careful consideration of the follow areas, in particular:

- Curricular integration of plurilingual pedagogical approaches, how they relate to or replace existing course structures, lesson planning and learning outcomes.
- Instructional resources which engage learners at both intellectual and social levels, while facilitating learner agency and the development of agile communication skills through plurilingual resources (Vom Brocke, 2011; Vom Brocke & Walker, 2012).
- Assessment which evaluates plurilingual repertoires (rather than accuracy-based correction) as a way to enhance language learners' abilities to negotiate meaning, construct and articulate knowledge and engage critically with it.
- Multimodal, digitally facilitated teaching and learning environments which facilitate collaborative learning via plurilingual resources.

With regards to the final point, Vogel & Garcia (2017) argue "for an expansive definition of translanguaging that encompasses not just the linguistic resources individuals draw upon to make meaning, but also the unique social actions enabled by technology use that become part of the individual's semiotic repertoire" (p. 13). Reconceptualising language learning and use in linguistically diverse virtual environments thus presents an opportunity for language teacher education to understand and draw on new ways of meaning-making and being in a globalized and connected world (Barton & Lee, 2013). What exactly global and connected will mean in a post-Covid19 world is likely to need rethinking. It may well be that flexible, project-based approaches such as telecollaborations will offer teachers and learners opportunities to take advantage of technologies not only to bridge or compensate for the lack of physical contact, but to offer new, collaborative and plurilingual learning experiences. These may help develop the very conceptual, social and linguistic agilities required to negotiate new and evolving realities.

This article presented an online bilingual exchange to illustrate ways in which reflective teaching can result in innovative approaches even within a highly structured institutional environment. The eGroups case example was described here from a reflective teacher perspective and supported by a synthesis of findings from existing studies of the project. It is subject to a number of limitations, notably the absence of triangulation due to the lack of interview or survey data and the small number of focal groups involved. Due to the optional nature of the exchange, individual and group participation was variable and limits the ability to make generalisations.

## 5. Conclusion

The different kind of language learning Warschauer had in mind in 1998 may have been achieved in many ways, thanks to the immense advances in digitally facilitated language learning. Yet, the demands for language teaching practices which suit a plurilingual, dynamic and now pandemic-riven world are ever increasing. Projects such as the telecollaboration initiative discussed here may help affirm multilingualism as the norm and plurilingual practices as a resource, rather than a hindrance. In an age of postmethod pedagogies (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and rapidly changing educational demands in diverse contexts there is an imperative for “pedagogies of the possible” (Hélot & Ó Laoire, 2011) which can leverage plurilingual repertoires and are responsive to 21<sup>st</sup> century learner needs. This is unlikely to happen without reshaping institutional discourses in order to overcome privileged monolingual ideologies of being, knowing and doing and to legitimise plurilingual learners’ voices and abilities.

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